



Workers at a farm in the Char Falimari area of Moghalhat union in Lalmonirhat sadar upazila are seen taking the husk off freshly harvested maize, which offers ample returns for growers in the country. As such, maize cultivation has been growing by around 10 per cent annually over the past few years.

PHOTO: S DILIP ROY

Maize making its mark on farmers' lives

Farming sees substantial growth as growers' income rises

S DILIP ROY

In 1991, when Abul Kasem, a farmer of Hatibandha upazila in Lalmonirhat, a northwest bordering district, decided to cultivate maize, he was one of the few growers in his area.

The yield of the grain was low. Farmers did not have interest to allocate their lands to cultivate the crop.

Three decades later, the picture has changed a lot. The maize is now grown widely in his village and the district too thanks to the demand for the grain among feed millers that offers farmers a guaranteed market and brings profit.

"All the farmers in the village are now cultivating maize. They are producing 10-12 metric tonnes of maize in each hectare of land due to availability of improved seeds. We are giving more priority to maize cultivation as the profit is three times that of the cost. We cannot make much profit by cultivating other crops," said the 67-year-old Kasem.

Not only in his area, but cultivation of the crop has expanded massively in recent years because of huge demand for the cereal grain, making it a significant cash crop for farmers in the country.

During the current financial year 2022-23, farmers have grown the grain on more than 14 lakh acres, showed estimates by the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE).

A decade ago, in fiscal year 2011-12, farmers cultivated the grain on 487,000 acres. They bagged nearly 13 lakh tonnes of maize in that year, said Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) data.

During the fiscal year 2020-21, Bangladesh produced 40 lakh tonnes of maize in the fiscal year, up from 35.69



lakh tonnes the previous year, according to BBS.

Growers said the demand for the grain is so high in fact that buyers, such as poultry feed makers, pay in advance before collecting maize directly from them.

Maize cultivation is particularly popular along riverbanks and char lands as it offers better yields compared to other crops grown in such areas.

At present, around 5 lakh farmers grow maize on about 5.50 lakh hectares of land across the country with each hectare yielding up to 11 tonnes of the grain.

Farmers say their interest in maize cultivation gradually grew after seeing that they are getting the expected profit.

It costs between Tk 10,000 and Tk 12,000 to cultivate maize on one bigha of land, which produces some 35 to 45 maunds of the grain.

Each maund (37 kilogrammes) of maize can then be sold for Tk 1,000 to Tk 1,100, ensuring a profit of at least Tk 23,000.

Besides, there is less risk in growing maize as it can be produced twice a year while seasonal crops could lead to losses if the harvest fails.

Mizanur Haque, senior vice president of the Bangladesh Maize Association, said the grain has become highly popular among local farmers as it has helped them achieve financial stability.

But while maize cultivation is increasing day by day, about 20 to 30 per cent of the domestic demand is still met through imports.

Some 55 to 60 lakh tonnes of maize are now produced each year as demand has risen in line with the growing number of poultry feed and bakery companies in the country.

"So, maize is playing a vital role in the economic development of farmers in our country," he added.

Dr Jahangir Alam, an agricultural economist, said that domestic maize cultivation has expanded at a rate of

about 10 per cent annually over the years. "If this trend continues, we may not have to import maize after the next few years," he added.

Supen Chandra Das, a farmer of Madhupur village in Kaunia upazila of Rangpur, said maize cultivation requires low investment and effort while offering bumper yields.

He then pointed out that he makes a profit of more than Tk 1.20 lakh every year by growing maize on six bighas of land.

"There are concerns over marketing for other crops but we are never worried about marketing for maize," Das said.

"Maize farming has put a smile on our faces," he added.

Sahidul Islam, a representative of the Bengal Poultry Feed Company in the Baura area of Lalmonirhat, said they require 45,000 tonnes of maize every year.

About 80 per cent of this demand is met through local sources while imports make up the rest.

"We buy maize from farmers at a fair price and pay in advance," he added.

Sources at the DAE in Lalmonirhat said that maize is being cultivated on 41,000 hectares of land in the district, particularly in shoal areas of Teesta river.

Didarul Islam, a farmer in the Char Jorgach area of Brahmaputra river in Kurigram's Chilmari upazila, said he cultivated maize on 12 bighas of land this year.

"Maize farming has brought prosperity to my family," he added.

Aftab Uddin, additional director of the Rangpur DAE, said they provide farmers all kinds of support for maize cultivation.

"Maize farming has brought smiles among farmers in the region, especially char areas," he added.

DIGITAL DARE

Pace of digital progress making local law invalid!

MAHTAB UDDIN AHMED

Economists dub the lottery a stupidity tax because the odds of getting any payoff by investing in a lottery ticket are approximately equivalent to flushing the money down the toilet. Why in the world do we play the lottery? There may be many answers, but the first one would surely be seeing a lot of winners on TV or in newspapers, right? When was the last time we saw interviews with anybody who lost?

If the media covered a fraction of the losers, the lottery would have long been a thing of the past!

If you want to be a multi-millionaire, just go to a remote village and become a mobile banking agent to start an online gambling business. Several agents have become multi-millionaires thanks to this business. Social media is continuously advertising gambling apps such as Lucky Win, Glory Casino, Rapid Cash, and Emirates Lottery, luring the young generation.

The Public Gambling Act of 1867 prohibits all such gambling activities, including app makers, advertisers like Facebook and YouTube, traders, and of course, the players. And yet, such business practices are rampant, dodging our legal system and the cybercrime cell with much ease. In the process, a large number of people are falling victim to gambling addiction and other related crimes, not to mention siphoning off money outside the country.

A Digital Security Act was passed in 2018 with the aim of preventing the spread of racism, sectarianism, extremism, terrorist propaganda, and hatred against religious or ethnic minorities through social media, print media or any other electronic media. Leaving alone the debate on the

Act itself, one may ask if it is being enforced effectively, as a lot of prohibited content is still reaching the public through social media, which brings us to the question of whether our law enforcement agency is capable of preventing such contents from reaching the public?

If we look at the current scenario, the answer is clearly in the negative. While there is no doubt about the good intention of the authority, it is obvious that the problem lies in the lack of technological advancement required for the implementation of the Act.

Unfortunately, in countries like Bangladesh, laws are formulated based on traditional thinking, incognizant or incompatible with the digital progress in all fields. This gap between such laws and the rapid progress in technology is what makes their implementation a challenge, pointing to their futility. Under such circumstances, the law is executed without consistency, often becoming discriminatory.

Many countries like Bangladesh, with these laws, are not coping with the digital advancement in the era of 4IR. To address this challenge, lawmakers may consider the following factors:

1. Adopting new laws and regulations that address digital technologies' specific issues and opportunities;
2. Updating existing laws and regulations to adapt to the developments of digital technologies;
3. Using new technologies at the time of formulating or updating the law to ensure enforceability;
4. Learning new skills to keep up with the pace and complexities of digital technologies and their legal implications;
5. Addressing the lack of a common and coherent legal framework for digital issues at the international and regional levels;
6. Considering the challenges of enforcing existing laws in the digital sphere, especially across borders.

It is vital to address this challenge, which will only grow in the coming days if no action is taken. Laws are as important as their enforcement. Lawmakers need to understand the pace of digital progression, and law-enforcing agencies should be technically equipped with international collaboration.

The author is founder and managing director of BuildCon Consultancies Ltd

Dhaka, Ctg stocks rise

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The prime index of the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) rose slightly yesterday.

The DSEX, the benchmark index of the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE), added 8 points, or 0.14 per cent, to close at 6,290.

However, the DS30, the blue-chip index, increased 0.08 per cent to 2,195 while the DSES, the Shariah-compliant index, went up 0.01 per cent to 1,368.

Turnover, a key indicator of the market, gained 31 per cent to Tk 932 crore. Of the securities, 115 advanced, 57 declined and 181 did not show any price movement.

Trust Islami Life Insurance made the highest gain with an increase of 10 per cent.

Bangladesh General Insurance Company, Khulna Printing & Packaging, Navana CNG, and Global Insurance Company were among the top gainers.

Dutch Bangla Bank was the highest loser, shedding 6.9 per cent. Gemini Sea Food, Midland Bank, Heidelberg Cement Bangladesh, and Agni Systems were also on the list of significant losers.

Bangladesh Shipping Corporation was the most-traded stock of the day with its issues worth Tk 49 crore transacting. Rupali Life Insurance Company, Intraco Refueling Station, Gemini Sea Food, and Provati Insurance Company registered significant turnover as well.

The Caspi, the all-share price index of the Chittagong Stock Exchange, attained 25 points, or 0.13 per cent, to close at 18,530. Of the issues, 76 rose, 45 retreated and 90 did not see any price swing.

However, turnover of the port city bourse rose 17 per cent to Tk 12.73 crore.



Employees work at the assembly line for the Volkswagen ID 4 electric car of German carmaker Volkswagen in the production site of Emden, northern Germany. The country's powerful auto industry association is urging the European Union and Britain to postpone post-Brexit rules it says would hamper the transition to electric vehicles, potentially boosting the hand of UK-based carmakers calling for the same. PHOTO: AFP/FILE

Eastland Insurance makes higher profit in Q1

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Eastland Insurance Company Ltd made a Tk 3.1 crore profit in the first quarter of the current financial year, up about 5.5 per cent compared to a year earlier.

The insurer reported a Tk 2.94 crore profit in the identical January-March quarter in 2022.

Thus, the earnings per share rose to Tk 0.37 in January-March from Tk 0.35 in the same period of 2022, according to the unaudited financial statements.

The net operating cash flow per share improved to Tk 0.16 in January-March of 2023 against Tk 0.14 a year ago.

The net asset value per share stood at Tk 21.56 on March 31 this year, up from Tk 21.19 on the same day last year.

Shares of Eastland Insurance surged 9.92 per cent to Tk 27.70 on the Dhaka Stock Exchange yesterday.